

**Testimony Submitted by Dora Ramos to the Housing Committee**  
**SB 291: “An Act Concerning Certain Protections for Group and Family Child Care Homes”**  
**Connecticut General Assembly**  
**March 10, 2022**

Good morning Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, ranking members, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Dora Ramos and I am the owner of NOVA Academy, a family child care program in Stamford, Connecticut. I’m here to testify in support of SB 291. I have my degree in early childhood development, social work, and nutrition. I use the skills that I have acquired to help the children learn. At NOVA Academy we base the curriculum on the children's interests which is best practice. I pride myself on providing a healthy and safe environment for the children. The program is open all year with the exception of a few holidays. We think a lot about our families. They have different schedules so we try our best to accommodate their needs.

I applied for my group family child care license in winter last year around March. I spent more than \$13,500. The first thing I needed to do was submit a zoning application which cost me \$1,500. The application alone does not guarantee approval by the zoning board. If you’re not approved you do not get a refund. On top of the application, I hired an architect which came to \$6,000. I was advised to do a traffic study. This and the survey of the property were both \$3,000 individually. I waited for my first meeting with the zoning board and when the day came my meeting was canceled without explanation. I called my architect and neither of us could find out why. I ended up getting no response at all. I had to find out through other sources that they had just decided to move the appointment without telling me.

To be proactive, I sent letters to the neighbors and I introduced myself. My first meeting with the zoning board went well. But then for the second meeting, some of my neighbors spoke out against me. I understand this is part of the process. But then one day they gathered in front of my driveway and started making comments. I tried my best to ignore it. I wouldn’t say anything. Every time I would go for a walk they would stop me and say “no, we don’t want you to continue with this”.

This process has caused me a lot of stress. Besides the money that I spent on applying for the license I also went to the doctor. I kept getting little colds and getting very sick. The doctor said it was from the stress. Last year I got sick, not because of Covid but because of my neighbors. It was so stressful. But I couldn’t even take a walk because my neighbors would come up to me. I called the Office of Early Childhood and asked what I can do. They said to call the police and

report them. My architect discouraged me from calling the police because I would need the support of my neighbors to get approved for the group family child care license.

I decided to drop the application for now because it wasn't healthy for me. In my case it was my health or to keep going. I didn't want to have any more confrontations with the neighbors. I need to take care of myself in order to take care of the children. It was a hard decision with all of the money that I invested. I had a big waiting list. Some of the families work in New York and some of them moved from another state to look for a better future. Unfortunately, I've had to turn away a lot of families. I told them it's not in my hands. I've had to refer them to other programs. I still have a big waiting list. You want to try and serve more families, but it's a big challenge trying to work with zoning.

I bought this house and it's beautiful. But I did think about moving. What I like about this place is that it's so connected to nature. I am a true believer that children should learn through nature the whole year. My passion has always been working with children. I've been working with children since I was eighteen years old. I love to see the difference that I can make in a child. Children are the future of our country. We're trying to make a difference in their lives. We're working them every single day since they were babies. We're working with them so they can become beautiful and amazing citizens that will make a difference in this world.

I'm sad for all of the families that I have to turn down. I don't think it's fair. Where are the voices of the children? The children have no voice. They cannot say I really need to be in an environment where I can learn. Right now educators are the voice of children and families. This is why I am asking you to support SB 291.

Thank you.

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